

## ENTOMOLOGY AND NURSERY RHYMES

BY HARRY B. WEISS

Although natural history of a sort is found in nursery rhymes and songs, references to insects are quite scarce in the light and frivolous reading matter of infants. Insects, of course, have no place in the nursery and during the early years of children, their imaginations and their romantic inclinations are nourished and satisfied by types of A B C fiction involving objects with which they are familiar. By the time they have become conscious of insects, their interest in nursery rhymes has disappeared.

Nevertheless, a few insects have crept into the nursery and have remained there over the years, exerting perhaps some influence on the fancy of children. In the nursery classic, "Death and Burial of Cock Robin," an unidentified fly and beetle are immortalized.

Who saw him die?  
I, said the fly  
With my little eye—  
I saw him die.

Who made his shroud?  
I, said the beetle,  
With my little needle—  
I made his shroud.

The most famous of all nursery insects is the lady bird beetle.

Lady bird, lady bird, fly away home,  
Thy house is on fire, thy children all gone,  
All but one, and her name is Ann,  
And she crept under the pudding-pan.

This jingle and variations of it are known to the children of many localities in various countries, and it is said to have first made its appearance in England during the reign of George II. Various substitutes appear for lady bird, such as lady bug, lady cow, lady fly, bonnie bee, etc. A few of the different versions are as follows:

Lady cow, lady cow, fly away home;  
Thy house is on fire, thy children all roam,

All but one that lies under a stone.  
Fly away lady cow, ere it is gone.

Bless you, bless you, bonnie bee!  
Say, when will your wedding be?  
If it be tomorrow day  
Take your wings and fly away.

Lady-bird! lady-bird! fly away home;  
Thy house is a-fire, thy children will roam!  
List! List! to their cry and bewailing!  
The pitiless spider is weaving their doom,  
Then lady-bird! lady-bird! fly away home!  
Hark! hark! to thy children's bewailing.

Bishop, Bishop Barnabee,  
Tell me when my wedding be:  
If it bee tomorrow day,  
Take your wings and fly away!  
Fly to the east, fly to the wst,  
Fly to him that I love best.

The gnat, at least in some parts of England, comes in for some attention from children.

Gnat, gnat, fly into my hat,  
And I'll give you a slice of bacon,  
And when I bake  
I'll give you a cake  
If I am not mistaken.

And in the Isle of Wight an old song perpetuates a myth to the effect that dragon flies can distinguish good from bad children when they are fishing.

Snake stanger! snake stanger! vlee aal about the brooks;  
Sting aal the bad bwoys that vor the vish looks,  
But lat the good bwoys ketch aal the vish they can,  
And car'm awaay whooam to vry 'em in a pan;  
Bred and butter they shall yeat at zupper wi' their vish,  
While aal the littul bad bwoys shall only lick the dish.

This made its appearance in the nursery as—

Dragonfly! dragonfly! fly about the brook;  
Sting all the bad boys who for the fish look;  
But let the good boys catch all that they can,  
And then take them home to be fried in a pan;  
With nice bread and butter they shall sup upon their fish,  
While all the little naughty boys shall only lick the dish.

In the "Gentleman's Magazine" for November, 1806, there appeared for the first time "The Butterfly's Ball and the Grasshopper's Feast," written by William Roscoe for his youngest son Robert. Early in 1807 it was published by John Harris, successor to John Newbery, as the first of his popular series of children's books. It even attracted the attention of the king and queen and was set to music, by Sir George Smart, at their request, for the young princess.

"The Butterfly's Ball," in comparison with the current literature for children at that time, was fresh and spontaneous. It was not a dreary, moral tale and it was an immediate success, marking the beginning of a new type of reading matter for children. It also produced a crop of imitations, many of which were inferior.

Its author, William Roscoe (1753-1831) was an attorney, one of the founders of a Liverpool society for the encouragement of the arts of painting and design, a botanist, a poet, a banker, a student of Greek, an author on diverse subjects, etc., etc., and he has three pages devoted to him in the Dictionary of National Biography. By many, however, he is remembered solely as the author of "The Butterfly's Ball and the Grasshopper's Feast," which is herewith reprinted in full.

#### THE BUTTERFLY'S BALL AND THE GRASSHOPPER'S FEAST

Come take up your hats,  
And away let us haste,  
To the Butterfly's Ball  
Or the Grasshopper's Feast.

The trumpeter Gad-fly  
Has summon'd the crew,  
And the revels are now  
Only waiting for you.

On the smooth shaved grass,  
By the side of a wood,  
Beneath a broad oak,  
Which for ages had stood.

See the children of earth,  
And the tenants of air,  
To an evening's amusement  
Together repair.

And there came the Beetle,  
So blind and so black,  
And carried the Emmet,  
His friend on his back.

And there came the Gnat,  
And the Dragon-fly too,  
And all their relations—  
Green, orange and blue.

And there came the Moth  
With her plume of down,  
And the Hornet with jacket  
Of yellow and brown.

Who with him the Wasp,  
His companion did bring,  
But they promised that evening  
To lay by their sting.

The sly litle Dormouse,  
Peep'd out of his hole,  
And led to the feast,  
His blind cousin the Mole.

And the Snail with his horns,  
Peeping out of a shell,  
Came fatigued with the distance,  
The length of an ell.

A Mushroom the table,  
And on it was spread,  
A water-dock leaf,  
Which their table-cloth made.

The viands were various,  
To each of their taste,  
And the Bee brought the honey  
To sweeten the feast.

With steps most majestic,  
The Snail did advance,  
And he promised the gazers  
A minuet to dance.

But they all laugh'd so loud  
That he drew in his head,  
And went in his own  
Little chamber to bed.

Then as the evening gave way  
To the shadows of night,

Their watchman the glow-worm  
Came out with his light.

So home let us hasten,  
While yet we can see,  
For no watchman is waiting  
For you or for me.

In 1820, Thomas Boys of 7 Ludgate Hill, London, brought out "Chrysallina; or, the butterfly's gala. Addressed to two little girls. In six parts. viz. The ball. The masquerade. The race. The theatre. The tournament. The departure. By R. C. Barton." This little 48 page book of verses ( $5\frac{1}{4} \times 4\frac{1}{8}$  inches), intended for children beyond the nursery age, was embellished by an engraved frontispiece and by engravings at the beginning of each part.

These illustrations can hardly be called entomological, although the scenes and characters have entomological touches.

Mr. Wilbur M. Stone, noted collector and bibliophile, permitted me to examine his copy of "Chrysallina," but the text is too long for reproduction here. The first part, entitled "The Ball" is concerned with the court festivities surrounding this function, with the butterfly as queen. A few quotations will enable one to get an idea of how the author handled his subject.

So if you sit still, you shall hear of the call  
To the Butterfly's Gala at Chrysalis hall.—  
But first you must know, that of insects the queen,  
Long the leader of fashion the Butterfly's been.  
For like many gay ladies that glitter at court,  
She has nothing to do but her beauty to sport,  
No children to nurse, and no husband to cherish,  
The poor may go hungry, the sickly may perish,  
As long as she flutters, and basks in the sun,  
She cares not who dies, and p'rhaps laughs at the fun.

After dwelling upon the capriciousness and tyranny of the queen and of the homage she expected, the author has the queen announce a fete on her birthday, the first of May, to continue a week and so on that day the affair began.

The insects from every retreat were approaching;  
Regardless of friends, or on neighbors encroaching;  
Some flying, some creeping, some waddling in haste,  
Each bringing some proof of their genius or taste.

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As that hour drew near, in her boudoir was seen,  
 In magnificent splendour, the Chrysalline queen;  
 A moss rose sustain'd her fair majesty's throne,  
 On which she reclined with a grace all her own.  
 The violet her footstool, while over her head  
 The geranium's broad leaf a green canopy spread:  
 And scatter'd around in a most graceful display  
 All the sweets of the garden promiscuously lay.

The queen was attended by her suite which discussed politics and the weather. Six lady birds were maids of honor and her pages were grasshoppers, lizards and flies, "all of elegant form but diminutive size."

Her physicians were Black-beetles, pompous and proud;  
 And the fav'rite an Ear-wig is always allow'd;  
 Her heralds were Gnats, with their horns to proclaim  
 Through the staircase and hall each illustrious name.

A lady spider brought the queen a cobweb; Mrs. Moth brought a wonderful load, the jewel she had found in the head of a toad. A dashing young grasshopper kissed the queen's hand, and other insects entered and paid their respects to her. Five hundred glowworms attended the queen and illuminated the lawn where the dance was held. Music was furnished by canary birds, bull-finches, linnets and thrushes. The queen danced with young ear-wigs, grasshoppers with lady birds, and so on.

The next evening there was a grand masquerade. For this, thousands of fireflies supplied the illumination, as the glowworms were tired out by their work on the previous evening.

The succeeding days and nights were occupied by such activities as races, amateur theatricals, and tournaments, all participated in by insects, and the last lines are devoted to the departure of the insects to their normal homes and activities.

The entire poem is really a sort of pleasant satire on court displays, diversions, and social activities even though written as something new to please young people.

During the first half of the nineteenth century "Baby-Bye," with its glorification of the housefly, was a popular piece in the "readers" of that period. This, of course, was long before the

housefly was renamed the "typhoid fly" by some writers, and long before numerous pathogenic bacteria had been isolated from it.

Nowadays, a mother, at least an entomological mother, would shudder if she saw this purveyor of filth, bacteria, protozoan cysts, and helminth eggs, this wallower and feeder in fecal matter, this hairy vomiting distributor of 500,000,000 bacteria, tickling *her* baby's nose. And who would blame her? However, here is "Baby-Bye," an enlivening little thing from a benighted age.

#### BABY-BYE

1. Baby-Bye  
 Here's a fly  
 We will watch him, you and I.  
     How he crawls  
     Up the walls  
     Yet he never falls!  
 I believe with six such legs  
 You and I could walk on eggs.  
     There he goes  
     On his toes  
     Tickling Baby's nose.
2. Spots of red  
 Dot his head;  
 Rainbows on his back are spread;  
     That small speck  
     Is his neck;  
     See him nod and beck!  
 I can show you, if you choose,  
 Where to look to find his shoes,  
     Three small pairs,  
     Made of hairs;  
     These he always wears.
3. Flies can see  
 More than we  
 So how bright their eyes must be!  
     Little fly,  
     Ope your eye;  
     Spiders are near by.  
 For a secret I can tell,  
 Spiders never use flies well;  
     Then away,  
     Do not stay.  
     Little fly, good day.